

## *Francophone literary archives at risk*

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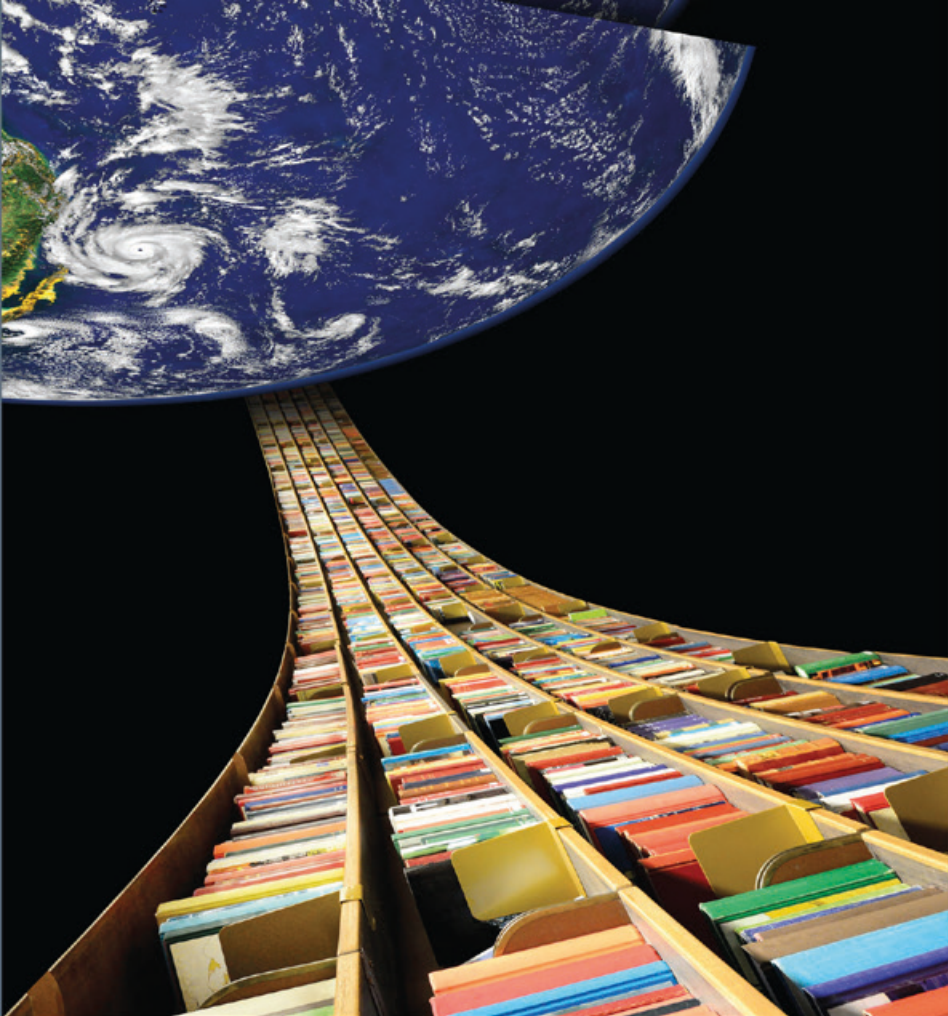
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# THE FUTURE OF LITERARY ARCHIVES

## DIASPORIC AND DISPERSED COLLECTIONS AT RISK

Edited by **DAVID C. SUTTON**  
with **ANN LIVINGSTONE**

Amsterdam  
University  
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## Chapter 7

# FRANCOPHONE ARCHIVES AT RISK

SOPHIE HEYWOOD

Archives are fragile. They are easily destroyed by human hand, difficult environmental factors, or natural disasters, and are vulnerable to neglect, whether deliberate or due to severe lack of resources. Local custodians may not have the funding or the political willpower to protect important collections from physical deterioration. Over the past two decades many different organizations and initiatives have been established to address this challenge.<sup>1</sup> However, the fragility of archives remains a live question. Much more work needs to be done to protect archives at risk at both a national and an international level, as well as to concert the work that is currently being carried out by myriad organizations across a variety of regions.

This essay explores initiatives within French-speaking transnational structures and contexts to protect literary archives.<sup>2</sup> The situation in a number of francophone countries is critical. War and its aftermath, along with religious extremism, and political unrest threaten archive materials in francophone regions across Africa and the Middle East, notably the Republic of Congo, Mali, and Syria.<sup>3</sup> In the Caribbean region, the situation in Haiti following the devastation caused by tropical storms and the earthquake in 2010 is particularly concerning.<sup>4</sup> The question of the slender

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**1** Such programmes include, but are not limited to: UNESCO's Memory of the World programme (1992); Archiveros sin Fronteras (1998); the British Library and Arcadia's Endangered Archives Programme (2004); see *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, edited by Maja Kominko; more recently swisspeace has established a partnership with the Swiss Federal Archives on safeguarding human rights archives, entitled *Dealing with the Past* (2011).

**2** In this essay I will use "francophone" without capitalization to refer to French-speakers or the French-speaking communities in general, and the capitalized "Francophone" to indicate the political organization of French-speaking countries across the globe.

**3** On the situation in the Middle East, see Albert Dichy's "Méditerranées francophones"; on Francophone Africa and Caribbean, see Pierre-Marc de Biasi's "Un patrimoine à sauvegarder" and the special issue of *Continents Manuscrits*, "Manuscrits francophones du sud: un état des lieux," edited by Claire Riffard and Jean Jonassaint, 1 (2014) <http://coma.revues.org/228>.

**4** The Digital Library of the Caribbean is running a project to support the vulnerable archives and libraries of Haiti: <http://dloc.com/dloc1/haitianlibhelp>.

resources available to local institutions is perhaps the most serious threat to literary archives, and the francophone world includes some of the nations ranked lowest in the global development index, such as Haiti and Madagascar. As the Senegalese author and statesman Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote in 1989, the “irreparable losses” of literary heritage “have been instrumental in permanently distorting the contribution of our peoples to universal civilization” (Senghor, 1989, 4). This risk remains important, and has become even more urgent with renewed threats from climate change and new forms of warfare.

Drawing together and sharing perspectives is essential to facing the problem of archives in danger, for the preservation of literary heritage is a global issue, but it is also highly localized, even personalized. Literary archives are the private papers of an individual, and may be dispersed across different regions and institutions due to the effects of diaspora and the cosmopolitanism of writers, just as they may be affected by national factors such as research priorities, copyright, funding, infrastructure, and questions of protecting national heritage. In addition, the question of the language the papers are written in is particularly crucial in the context of a global literary market, and more often than not it can be a decisive factor in efforts to preserve papers. As one of the large language areas whose literary production attracts the attention of international manuscript collectors, and with large and unique transnational structures organized according to the shared French language and culture, the French-speaking efforts to address these issues are far-reaching and distinctive.

This essay sets out some of the singularities of the francophone experience, and highlights differences in approaches and methodologies in the French work to safeguard global literary heritage. I will explore this work through two case studies: first that of a French literary manuscript research institute and its team, which works in collaboration with local scholars and custodians on preserving francophone manuscripts in the global south, and second, the non-governmental approach of a much smaller French literary and publishing archive. The essay is structured around three key areas where the French experience has been distinctive. First, the research agenda plays an important role in driving preservation efforts: the traditions of scholarship and academic context are markedly different to English-language contexts, and have shaped priorities, and subsequent responses to the problem of archives at risk. The marginalization of francophone literature and suspicion of postcolonial theory in French scholarship meant that much literary heritage in the French-speaking global south was neglected, and there had been little investment until relatively recently. Second, the international organization of French-speaking countries, La Francophonie, is built around the idea of a shared linguistic and cultural heritage. Cultural cooperation was at the heart of the francophone union as envisaged by Léopold Sédar Senghor in the 1960s (Poissonnier and Sournia, 2006, 8–9), and remains one of the principal missions of its modern incarnation, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. These structures offer an important channel for action, but they are also politically sensitive and open to accusations of neo-colonialism, and so the teams involved tread with caution, and



also seek bilateral options where possible. Third, French-led rescue work has often been characterized by a state-focused approach. The final section examines how the highly personal and political nature of literary archives can also require smaller, non-governmental solutions.

An examination of these French-led programmes, the ethical and political issues they raise, and the opportunities and problems they have encountered in the course of their work, provides instructive case studies in archive rescue work, and, it must be hoped, can suggest ways forward for collaboration.

## Manuscrits francophones du Sud

In France, the importance of genetic literary criticism in the academic tradition has inspired initiatives to safeguard archives at risk. For close to ten years, the French-led research initiative “Manuscrits francophones du Sud” (Francophone manuscripts of the global south), under the direction of two genetic literary scholars, Claire Riffard and Daniel Delas, has been working to address the multiple issues facing archives at risk in francophone Africa and the French-speaking Caribbean.<sup>5</sup> The programme started out in response to the cases of the archives of two important authors in urgent need of preservation. The first was the case of the Congolese author and playwright Sony Labou Tansi (1947–1995). Following his death, friends and colleagues had begun to gather together his papers, notebooks, and unpublished manuscripts, when war broke out. Labou Tansi’s home in Brazzaville was ransacked, the papers were dispersed, and some of them feared destroyed.<sup>6</sup> (His manuscripts were not the only ones to be caught up in the terrible events of 1998—the house of his friend and fellow author Sylvain Bemba (1934–1995) was razed to the ground in a fire, and all papers destroyed.) Researchers working on Labou Tansi’s writings and plays returned to the Republic of Congo in 2003, and began to work on gathering the papers together once more, with a view to publishing them and commemorating his work. At around the same time, the family of the Madagascan poet Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo (1903–1937) decided to deposit his papers to ensure that his complete works could finally be published. The papers had been stored in the family home. After almost sixty years with no specialist preservation work, they were in serious need of attention.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, the teams of French and local scholars who were working in these countries encountered similar difficulties in terms of lack of funding, specialist knowledge, and facilities to house the papers safely and appropriately.

Consequently, the specialist “Manuscrits francophones du Sud” team was set up in 2007 by Pierre-Marc de Biasi, director of the Institute of Modern Texts and

<sup>5</sup> [www.item.ens.fr/index.php?id=579252](http://www.item.ens.fr/index.php?id=579252); see also the special issue edited by Claire Riffard and Daniel Delas, “Afrique-Caraïbe,” *Genesis* 33 (2011), <https://genesis.revues.org/583>.

<sup>6</sup> See Nicolas Martin-Granel’s “Sony Labou Tansi, afflux des écrits et flux de l’écriture.”

<sup>7</sup> The project is described by Laurence Ink, “Sauvegarde et valorisation du fonds d’archives familiales de Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo à Madagascar,” in *Continents Manuscrits* 1 (2014), <http://coma.revues.org/210>.

Manuscripts (ITEM), based in the French National Centre for Scientific Research. The aim was to address both the specific research questions raised by literary archives produced in colonial and postcolonial contexts and the closely related urgent question of ensuring the survival of such material. It also raises the painful and long-suppressed turbulent history of the relations between France and its former colonies. For a long time, postcolonial theory received a frosty reception in French scholarship. The ITEM programme represents an important part of the recent work to reverse this “forgetting of the postcolonial text”<sup>8</sup> (Combe, 2011). In the words of de Biasi, metropolitan France owes a debt to its former colonies, and has a responsibility to think carefully and sensitively about how to work with these countries to help to ensure that the literary heritage of the present and future is not also lost (Introductory remarks, Treilles, 2013). The overarching goal of the “Manuscripts francophones du Sud” programme is therefore to ensure that scholarship on the thriving literary culture (and therefore heritage) of the French-speaking world is developed with the same possibilities of scholarly rigour that French “hexagonal” authors enjoy. Only through a proper and extensive focus on preserving their literary archives can the historical marginalization of “francophone” authors in the literary canon begin to be redressed.

The scope of the Manuscripts francophones programme includes three key areas: first, the identification and mapping of archives in danger; second, the preservation and durable safeguarding of these archives; and third, the valorization of these archives through research, publication, and, where possible, digitization and the placing of digitized material online. The emphasis is always to carry out this work in synergy with local actors and to respect national sovereignty in matters of heritage. The programme’s work has also benefited from the ITEM’s long experience in international collaboration to address issues of endangered manuscripts, principally in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. The Littérature latino-américaines XX<sup>e</sup> siècle team has worked on Latin American and Caribbean authors in cooperation with researchers based in universities in Paris and across Latin America since 1983. Central to this work was the Multilateral Agreement on Archival Research from 1984, and the Archivos collection of critical editions of leading authors from Latin America and the Caribbean, part funded and published by UNESCO (Segala, 1989). The new team shares this emphasis on promoting multilateral collaboration and awareness-raising work on the international stage. The principal differences between the Latin American projects and the new francophone programme are the greater accent placed on genetic literary criticism, and the mobilization of francophone channels and bilateral partnership work.

The first strand to the Manuscripts francophones programme is the identification of literary archives at risk. The team works in cooperation with local universities and authors’ families to identify such archives. Their current aim is to compile a

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<sup>8</sup> This recent interest in postcolonial studies has been the subject of heated debate in France: see for example Jean-François Bayart’s *Les Etudes Postcoloniales, Un Carnaval Académique*.

systematic inventory of all the literary archive fonds in Africa and the Caribbean, in all languages. To this end they have launched a digital mapping project called Cartomac, and are setting up a network of researchers led by the Ivorian scholar Jean-Francis Ekoungoun ([www.eman-archives.org/Cartomac/](http://www.eman-archives.org/Cartomac/)). This online platform consists of a database of all the literary archive fonds in their inventory, and a digital interface of online interactive maps linked to the database, to describe the information that has been gathered. The mapping tool allows the user to visualize in a single click the history of an archive (from its creation by a writer up to its preservation in an institution); the user can learn about the risks linked to its preservation, as well as any difficulties of access to the archive. By creating a user-friendly way to represent the dispersal of literary archives on a global scale, and with an online data entry form for researchers, the aim is to promote access to and interpretation of these sources among members of the research community, as well as to raise awareness about literary archives in the broader public.

The selection of the authors and material to include in the research programme is then based on two criteria: literary quality and vulnerability. The parameters of the project are defined according to geographical regions; however, given that authors' lives and works transcend national boundaries, geographical boundaries are understood to be a starting place rather than an end point (Riffard, 2015, 32–33). The programme's current projects are focused on Sony Labou Tansi (Congo), Ahmadou Kourouma (Ivory Coast), Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo (Madagascar), Albert Memmi (Tunisia), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Frankétienne (Haiti), Mohammed Dib (Algeria), Mouloud Feraoun (Algeria), and Amadou Hampâté Bâ (Mali). In many cases, the literary estates requested help in the treatment of the papers, as well as to ensure that the author's work continues to reach its audience and research is encouraged. More often than not, the papers are dispersed, shared between the family or estate, private institutions, and national libraries. The papers of Albert Memmi (b. 1920) are a case in point: some are deposited with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, while most are still stored in his library at home. Similarly, the widow of the Algerian author Mohammed Dib (1920–2003) left his papers to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The ITEM team are now working with partners in three Algerian universities to begin the work of analyzing the oeuvre, in preparation for the publication of his complete works and a large exhibition to be held in 2020.

Once an author's fonds has been identified, the next stage is to try to bring together, catalogue, classify, and digitize the archive material to ensure that it can be preserved in an appropriate and enduring manner. Faced with situations where there are often no professional archivists on the ground to assist this process, the ITEM researchers have had to receive training in the basic principles of archiving. This part of their task involves working outside of their specialism as literary scholars. Their first priority is to ensure that the archive is as complete as possible, with papers from different locations brought together, and, where dispersal between different institutions and hands has taken place, that the different locations are identified and recorded in the programme's database. The team puts together an inventory of its contents,

and proceeds with any treatment of damaged documents as necessary. Each document within the fonds is classed and described according to the strict requirements prescribed by genetic criticism, with a view to promoting detailed genetic research of the material and eventual genetic editions to be published. Where necessary, perhaps because there are no facilities for preserving it in the source country, or if the archive is in danger for reasons of war or politics, the team then identifies a temporary deposit institution. For example, the Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo archive is currently being held in the Institut Français in Madagascar in specialist containers, and is available to researchers on demand. Sony Labou Tansi's archive now has a permanent home in the Limoges francophone institute, at the request of his family, in recognition of the strong connections the writer had with the Limoges francophone literary festival (<http://sonylaboutansi.bm-limoges.fr>). This type of work requires the team to find solutions that suit all the stakeholders, that respect national sovereignty in cultural heritage (where possible), and that take into consideration the appropriateness of location, alongside possibilities for access.

As the project has progressed, the importance of this identification and cataloguing work has become clear. One of the main discoveries of the programme has been the significant proportion of the writings of the leading francophone authors in the global south that has never been published. The ratio of published to unpublished work in the francophone authors' oeuvres studied to date has typically been 20% to 80%, while the reverse has been true for their Northern counterparts. The work carried out by the team on authors' archives has revealed the extent to which some of the leading francophone authors were ill-served by the literary publishing ecosystem in their regions, notably in countries in Africa and the French Caribbean, and how the works of such authors have been disproportionately subject to censorship, and extensive editorial interventions by publishers in the global north. The archives of Ahmadou Kourouma, for example, reveal the extent to which publishers radically altered his works. Even the archives of the well-known and extensively studied oeuvre of the Martinican author Aimé Césaire contained important unpublished material (Gil, 2016). This unexpected discovery of a far greater wealth of material than they had initially expected, and the realization that if the manuscripts are destroyed, then the literary heritage is lost once and for all, has spurred the team on in their work. It has also further emphasized the importance of the final stage in their work, which is a large-scale publication project.

If cultural heritage is to be safeguarded in the long term, then it has to be accompanied by strategies to promote access and encourage scholarship in the wider research community, and for this reason the ITEM team has focused much energy on the production of high-quality research tools. To date, the projects have produced six genetic editions of the works of the authors they are working on.<sup>9</sup> The team

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<sup>9</sup> All publications are Paris, CNRS Éditions, Collection "Planète libre": Pierre Brunel (ed.), L. S. Senghor, *Poésie complète*, 2007; Claire Riffard, Serge Meitinger, and Liliane Ramarosoa (ed.), J. J. Rabearivelo, *Œuvres complètes*, two volumes, 2010, 2012; Guy Dugas (ed.), Albert Memmi, *Œuvres complètes* (I), 2015; James Arnold (ed.), Aimé Césaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 2014; Nicolas Martin-Granel and Claire Riffard (ed.), Sony Labou Tansi, *Œuvres complètes*, 2015.

has created the new collection “Planète Libre” for the collected works of francophone writers, modelled on both the earlier Latin American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean “Archivos” collection and Gallimard’s famous “Pléiade” collection of the canon of classic French authors, making clear the project’s aim to promote the wider critical recognition of francophone authors ([www.cnrseditions.fr/collection/275\\_\\_planete-libre](http://www.cnrseditions.fr/collection/275__planete-libre)). Texts in the volumes are compiled using the manuscripts, and include explanatory annotations, manuscript, and editorial variants. They are accompanied by documents detailing the reception of the oeuvre, previously unpublished works, facsimiles of manuscripts, and genetic analyses of the author’s writing process. The aim is to ensure that scholars who cannot access the author’s archive will nevertheless have all the necessary material for their research. However, as the programme’s co-director Claire Riffard notes, these editions have two major flaws: they are necessarily voluminous (often totalling over 1500 papers) and, in spite of the national scientific research centre’s (CNRS) subsidization of the collection, they are expensive (Riffard, 2015, 38). In light of these issues, the ultimate goal is to produce digital editions of an equally high standard for genetic research, available for free or at low cost, to make the material accessible to as wide a public as possible. The ITEM team is currently constructing an online platform entitled e-man, where digital images of the documents are accessible for free, annotated and along with bibliographic and genetic descriptions, and where possible, a literal transcription. Currently the Rabearivelo and Feraoun fonds can be consulted, but further additions are planned (<http://eman-archives.org/francophone/index.php>). However, the team is also mindful that full open access will not always be possible, due to copyright and privacy issues.

### **Globalization, Language, and Literary Manuscripts**

The second distinctive feature of this recent French initiative is the newly important role played by francophone channels of cooperation, its close focus on francophone literature, and the questions of the politics of globalization, heritage, and language this approach raises. The consolidation and expansion of international francophone structures in recent decades offers new possibilities for action and partnership work. The creation of the International Organization of La Francophonie (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, OIF) in 2005, which strengthened its earlier incarnation the Intergovernmental Agency of La Francophonie (Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie, AIF), introduced a renewed emphasis on promoting multilateral cooperation between the main francophone cultural and research operations, including the francophone universities’ organization (Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, AUF) and the Senghor University in Alexandria ([www.francophonie.org](http://www.francophonie.org)). The launch of the francophone digital libraries network (Réseau Francophone Numérique, RFN) in 2006 further confirmed the OIF’s commitment to the promotion of partnerships and preservation work in the cultural and heritage sector ([www.rfnum.org/pages/](http://www.rfnum.org/pages/)).

Still, as Claire Riffard writes, “we use this highly political term ‘francophonie’ sparingly” (Riffard, 2015, 33). The terms “francophone” literature and “La Francophonie”

carry historical baggage that has the potential to obscure the inclusive motivations of the scholars and activists working in the field of endangered archives (Forsdick and Murphy, 2003, 7). Charges of neo-colonialism have historically been levelled at La Francophonie. The problem, as Gabrielle Parker notes, is that as a phenomenon it is closely linked with colonization; while its founding fathers may have been African heads of state, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, it was perceived by many to be a convenient way for France to reassert its global influence as her imperial power waned. However, Parker notes that the direction La Francophonie has taken in the twenty-first century, focusing on linguistic and cultural diversity, as opposed to French universalism, has the potential to allay suspicions and create the space for a new emphasis on solidarity (Parker, 2003). Closely linked to this shift is the growing sensitivity in French research and discourse to the problems underpinning the term “francophone” when applied to literature. The distinction between “French literature,” written by authors who are from within the *hexagone*, and “francophone literature” to designate publications by all other French-speaking authors, has suggested, as Forsdick and Murphy write, “a neocolonial segregation and a hierarchization of cultures” (Forsdick and Murphy, 2003, 3). Thus authors from the French “hexagon” do not consider themselves to be “francophone”: the 2006 Salon du Livre in Paris on francophone literature was criticized for its failure to include a single “hexagonal” author, while the Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jalloun recalls Alain Robbe-Grillet’s indignant reaction when he suggested the Frenchman was also a francophone author (Jalloun, 2012, 4). The *Littérature Monde* (World Literature) movement further highlighted these tensions, when it published its manifesto for French language literature to be liberated from its association with the nation state in 2007.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, “francophone” literature remains the operative term. Research carried out by Lise Gauvin among extra-hexagonal writers concluded that for many writers the French language was a positive part of their identity: the Algerian playwright Kateb Yacine called it “one of the spoils of war” (Parker, 2003, 99). As Tahar Ben Jalloun writes, investigating an author’s origins is a matter for border guards; instead the literary community must be concerned to preserve the precious heritage of the many poetic and literary masterpieces wrought with the French language by authors from across the globe (Jalloun, 2012, 4).

In the twenty-first century, the problem is complicated by the question of minority languages and cultures and accelerated globalization. The language in which an author writes, and whether they can access a wider readership, play a key role in determining whether their papers will be preserved, but also, crucially, *where* those papers will be located. The high financial value of the manuscripts of globally famous authors can often lead to the removal of archives from their country of origin; the most recent example being the acquisition of the Nobel Prize-winning Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez’s archive, which was acquired by the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, for over \$2 million.

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**10** See the manifesto “Pour une ‘littérature-monde’ en français” and *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*, edited by Alex G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy.



As David Sutton writes, “there are generally only four countries in the world which regularly and systematically collect the papers of non-nationals, namely the USA, the UK, Canada and France. [...] The conclusion, in an international context, is that the language used by an author is a major factor in the eventual destination of his or her literary archive, and that the market in literary manuscripts, with so few countries involved in cross-border purchasing, is determined by considerations of language” (Sutton, 2014, 297–98). This aggravates the potential for fears of predation on the part of local custodians when foreign actors intervene in the preservation of literary archives. In this context, the new emphasis in La Francophonie on cultural diversity is crucial. While French is a central language in the global language system, it is struggling to compete with the hyper-central dominance of English. France and French-speaking countries have therefore become champions of linguistic and cultural diversity, and La Francophonie encompasses this polyglossia of its assembled nations, with one of its four declared missions being to promote this diversity.<sup>11</sup> In line with this approach, the ITEM team is at pains to stress that their approach is multilingual, and their research embraces the multiple languages in which so-called “francophone” authors may write. Through the genetic analysis of manuscripts the research by *Manuscrits francophones du Sud* has helped to further understanding of the creolized, multilingual forms of writing of authors such as Rabearivelo, or the ways in which Frankétienne self-translated into French from Haitian Creole, as well as the linguistically normative editorial strategies that have historically been imposed on extra-hexagonal authors, such as Ahmadou Kourouma (Riffard, 2015, 33; Jonassaint, 2011).

The ITEM’s work to preserve francophone cultural heritage in the global south is therefore alert to the broader context of globalization, linguistic rights, and postcolonial identities; the potential tensions between concepts of international and national heritage; and the consequent and very real fears of cultural appropriation. This concern informs the awareness-raising projects and partnership work that underpin its programme. Riffard notes the importance for the *Manuscrits francophones du Sud* team to work in partnership with local researchers, which can often be more appropriate than working through international organizations. She cites the example of their work in Algeria, where the question of cultural heritage and culture is an “explosive subject,” particularly when it concerns the French colonial period (Riffard, 2015, 34–35). When working on Mohammed Dib’s and Mouloud Feraoun’s archives, the team found that bilateral collaboration played a decisive role, with an end goal of handing over the project to Algerian university researchers. This type of approach ensures sustainability and that local actors can take the lead on preservation work. It demands the sharing of expertise and

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<sup>11</sup> Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux made this point at the ITEM’s Treilles Foundation conference, September 2–6, 2013. The other three missions of the OIF are to promote peace, democracy, and human rights; support education, training, higher education, and scientific research; and expand cooperation for sustainable development: [www.francophonie.org/-Qu-est-ce-que-la-Francophonie-.html](http://www.francophonie.org/-Qu-est-ce-que-la-Francophonie-.html).

capacities of existing programmes and institutions working in this area. To this end Riffard has also produced an online module on the preservation of modern literary manuscripts in the global south, diffused via the French Ministry for Culture's online training programme in cultural heritage ([www.e-patrimoines.org/patrimoine/protection-et-conservation-des-manuscrits/](http://www.e-patrimoines.org/patrimoine/protection-et-conservation-des-manuscrits/)).

Francophone structures offer potential solutions to the question of temporary institutional repositories for depositing certain archives at risk. Sometimes it is not possible to safeguard at risk archives in their country of origin, such as the papers of dissident authors, or archives located in war zones, or where severe climate events pose long-term or acute threats. In such cases, safe havens abroad can offer sustainable conditions of preservation. However, pre-negotiated agreements and guidelines are essential to protecting the rights and concerns of all stakeholders. The removal of archive material from its original location, however, further risks raising fears of appropriation: safe havens have to be located in geographically and politically appropriate locations; they must protect the material and be trustworthy in the eyes of all involved; the process must be accompanied by the development of a strategy for appropriate public access that respects moral rights and intellectual property, as well as the human rights of individuals, literary estates, and the community of readers. Such institutions are called upon to play an important mediation role between the interests of the public, the needs of the scholarly community, the rights of individuals, and the concerns of literary estates.

The ITEM team has been reflecting on how to work towards the creation of a global network of safe haven libraries. Its researchers have been studying this question in collaboration with a collective of specialists (archivists, lawyers, authors, scholars) that they assembled at a conference at the Treilles Foundation in southern France in September 2013 (*Sauver les Manuscrits*, Treilles, 2013). Such a project needs a jointly agreed legal framework to protect African and Caribbean documentary heritage from western predations. The focus of the Treilles conference was therefore how to develop such a framework and a set of model deposit contracts to protect and reassure the three main partners implicated in this process: families and literary estates, national collecting institutions, and researchers. Out of these discussions the Manuscrits francophones team developed an awareness-raising text designed to bring to the attention of the member states of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. The text drew their attention to the following issues:

- 1) The promotion of the identification and inventory of literary manuscript archives that are present in their countries; starting with the most vulnerable archives, with a view to their protection, respecting the principles set out in the Universal Declaration on Archives.
- 2) The conservation and digitization of literary manuscripts whose value has been recognized and the provision of conditions for their durable preservation in sites that can guarantee the necessary security, following an appropriate technical protocol.



- 3) That the archives be made accessible to all, in whichever form that may be, in a way that respects the rights of intellectual property (of creators, of copyright holders), the rights of persons, the rights of estates, and the rights of the research community.

The text also included the following proposal for three linked measures at the local level, according to the networks of expertise available in the countries concerned:

- 1) A network of experts and specialists (academics, publishers, conservators, etc.) capable of carrying out the inventory of urgent cases.
- 2) A network of francophone deposit libraries where these archives will be treated and preserved.
- 3) An international digital platform that permits the consultation online of the archives, and that respects the rights as set out above.<sup>12</sup>

This text has been signed by various scholars, writers, librarians, and archivists from the francophone world. Several heads of states have already been contacted with a view to creating pilot projects of temporary deposit institutions and education projects, and the text was presented to the assembled heads of state of francophone countries at the summit of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie held in Dakar in November 2014.

### Non-State Solutions

The work of the ITEM team has tended to operate through state-level heritage institutions, and supra-national federations of universities, typically affiliated to national research institutions. However, as their discussions at the Treilles conference made clear, such an approach is just one among many ways of facing this challenge. Albert Dichy, the literary director of a much smaller archive institution, the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), one of the ITEM's partners, noted that the issue of archives in danger requires not a single solution, but a range of solutions.<sup>13</sup> Private, non-governmental institutions have an important, complementary role to play in work on archives at risk, to help avoid the language of ownership that is implied in the notion of "heritage." For postcolonial authors, or dissident writers, such flexibility is crucial.

The work of the IMEC offers a model for such an approach ([www.imec-archives.com/en/](http://www.imec-archives.com/en/)). Based in Caen, France, the IMEC is a not-for-profit institution set up in 1988 by a group of researchers, supported by the French Ministry of Culture, specifically to conserve and manage the archives of publishers, literary and artistic journals, authors, and individuals involved in the literary and creative industries, in order to facilitate access for scholarly research. The IMEC's collecting policy has

<sup>12</sup> French text: <https://kouroumanus.hypotheses.org/405>.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Dichy, discussion at the Treilles conference *Sauver les Manuscrits Francophones*, and his paper "Archives at Risk," delivered at the conference *The Politics of Location*, organized by the Diasporic Literary Archives Network, Trinidad, March 25–26, 2014. The information that follows is based on these two papers.

always been focused on preserving literary heritage, regardless of the nationality of the author, or where the work was produced (Dichy, 2012, 3). It therefore does not have a specific “francophone” section in its catalogue. Nevertheless, it has become an important repository for francophone archives, including those of postcolonial and diasporic writers, such as Taos and Jean Amrouche, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Samuel Beckett, Frantz Fanon, Ahmadou Kourouma, Irène Némirovsky, and Georges Schehadé, among many others, as well as authors who wrote in other languages but had strong connections with French literary circles, such as Adonis and Nâzım Hikmet. This has often been at the request of the authors or their families. As the principal repository in France for publisher’s archives, the IMEC’s collections also include the archives of metropolitan publishers who published francophone authors, such as La Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner and Le Seuil, as well as the records of the leading African publishing house, *Présence Africaine*. As a result of its collection with global connections, it is a priority for the IMEC to make such fonds accessible for research and, in particular, to ensure that they can be shared with the country of origin. This can be done either through the creation of duplicates using digitization, or through partnerships with local institutions. For example, the IMEC organized a large exhibition in Beirut of the Georges Schehadé fonds, and published his complete works with the publisher An-Nahar, which included reproductions of the poet’s manuscripts and other papers. The IMEC also offers support to literary and artistic archives in francophone countries, through the provision of training and consultation. It has worked closely with the contemporary literature foundation at Rabat in Morocco and the Lebanese musical heritage centre in Beirut, for example. The goal is to promote a dialogue between cultures “without condescension,” as Albert Dichy puts it, and to break with a tradition of collecting policy that has all too often led to appropriation of the cultural heritage of other nations.

Dichy underscores the importance of what he calls the IMEC’s “light-touch” deposit contract, which allows authors or their estates to retain ownership of their papers, and deposit is not necessarily permanent. Depositing archives with the IMEC is a very different proposition for an author to handing over their papers to the French national library. For an author, to give their papers to the large and prestigious national library is an honour, but it is also to give them to the French state and to become part of French national heritage. The IMEC, on the other hand, is a small, semi-private archive management organization rather than an institution of the state. This is an important distinction for authors from postcolonial countries who find themselves unable or unwilling to keep their papers in their country of origin, but who do not wish to give them to the former colonial power. The Syrian poet Adonis, for example, needed to find a safe haven for his papers. He had been imprisoned by Assad’s regime, but feared that even if Assad’s regime toppled, as a member of the minority Alawite sect, he would be considered an enemy of the state by a new regime. He found the idea of giving his papers to the French state problematic, and preferred instead to place them in temporary deposit at the IMEC. Crucially, if an author or their estate wishes it, a clause can be added to the deposit contract stipulating the conditions under which the papers should be returned to

their country of origin. In this way, the IMEC's small and, to a certain extent, fragile status means it can intervene and help to protect cultural heritage, without raising fears of appropriation.

## Conclusion

This brief panorama of some of the work being carried on in the French-speaking world to safeguard literary heritage has highlighted the importance of flexibility and international cooperation. The French, along with the Americans, British, and Canadians dominate the field in global manuscript collection. This has laid them open to accusations of predation and cultural forms of neo-colonialism. In France, a revaluation and dialogue on literature from the postcolonial global south has taken place between writers and scholars from France and the Francophone world in the last decade. The ITEM, the leading literary manuscript research institute in France, has played an important part in this movement, in its work to promote francophone literary scholarship, through sharing resources, developing research partnerships with universities, and developing high-quality open-access (where possible) research tools. Francophone supra-national channels offer new opportunities for training, arbitration, and awareness-raising work. However, given the highly sensitive nature of working through such channels, in many cases, bilateral and non-governmental approaches can be more efficient. The emphasis, as Riffard and Dichy highlight, has to be placed on partnerships with local scholars and institutions, and, most importantly, on local actors taking control of such preservation initiatives. It is crucial to be alert to the diversity of contexts in which we find endangered literary manuscripts, and to the importance of multiple answers to this complex and multi-layered problem.

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